

## You Don't Have To Lie by harringrovecryptid

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**Summary:**

Steve Harrington didn't have a soulmark. that's what everyone at school thought, and that's what Billy was told when he moved to Hawkins. It was just something that happened once in a while. But Billy couldn't help but feel cheated.

(AKA: Billy and Steve are soulmates but Steve forgot)

## 1. Forget

Despite popular belief, Steve has a soulmark. It had just been years since he'd thought about it.

But it was still there.

In the arch on the bottom of his left foot, as if the universe itself was ashamed of it, in small careful letters, was the name "Billy."

Steve had never told anyone, not even his parents. It wasn't because of shame or anything. They just were never the nurturing kind, or the type of parents to emotionally invest in their child. His parents probably wouldn't even pay attention or care, just like they didn't really care about anything else in Steve's life.

He remembered being fourteen and sitting cross-legged in his bed, tracing the name that was supposed to mean so much to him. All he felt was confusion.

Tommy said when his soulmark appeared on his shoulder it felt warm, and when he and Carol touched it felt like static electricity. But Steve's mark didn't feel anything like that. Maybe something was wrong. Maybe his soulmate died, or didn't exist in the first place. Maybe it was all a mistake.

So Steve let everyone believe he didn't have a soulmark, because it was easier. Easier than feeling the whole school look at him with pity or disgust. Easier than waiting for some guy that might not even exist in the first place. Easier for people to see him as some kind of harborless flirt instead of a freakshow.

Besides, even if this "Billy" existed, it wasn't a guarantee that Steve would be his soulmate. Life was a bitch like that sometimes. And even if Billy was real, Steve wasn't quite sure how he'd handle it. Facing his problems was never one of his strengths.

Steve tried to ignore the irony that he was running away from something literally inked onto the bottom of his foot, and instead thanked whatever god was listening that it was in a place that was

easy to forget.

By the time Nancy Wheeler showed up Steve had bought into his own lie. He hadn't even thought about his soulmark in years.

Nancy was everything. Carol always complained she was too much of a Good-Girl to be any fun, but there was something about her that Steve liked. She reminded him of campfire embers, just waiting for someone to kick them up into a wildfire.

Loving Nancy was easy. She was smart, kind, earnest, and kissed like she had something to prove. What that thing was, Steve had no idea, but he figured it had something to do with why Nancy never talked about soulmarks.

Maybe she didn't have one either and saw him as a kindred spirit. Maybe she didn't like the name printed somewhere on her skin. Maybe it had something to do with the look of longing in Barbara's eyes that Nancy so tactfully avoided all the time. Steve wasn't one to judge.

And deep down he really didn't care. Nancy made him feel warm, loved, and not all alone in the world. Maybe neither of them had soulmarks, but that didn't matter. Steve knew he could and would fall in love with Nancy if given half the chance.

But she was shy and cautious. Steve thought it was because she hadn't been with anyone else before.

No one would have guessed it had something to do with the oldest Byers kid that was always wandering around school.

## 2. Erase

### Summary for the Chapter:

#### Billy's prologue

When Billy's soulmark first appeared he thought his father was going to kill him.

He was yelling, hitting, and calling him words Billy never heard before. All he knew was they made him feel broken and dirty.

Billy spent hours in the shower scrubbing at the name on his upper left ribs, hoping to wash away his dad's anger and that cold relentless fear in the pit of his stomach.

But it didn't work. He was just left trembling and raw with some boy's name imprinted too close to Billy's heart for him to feel anything but angry.

Angry at his dad for making him feel so worthless and wrong. Angry at himself for reasons Billy couldn't even put into words. Like this was somehow his fault. Angry at the name on his ribs for being written in such care-free swooping letters when Billy felt anything but free right now.

It wasn't fair.

But to be fair nothing else in his life had been. Why did Billy think his soulmark would be any different?

Maybe it was because he naively thought that was how love worked. Everything was supposed to be easier with your soulmate. At least, that was the fluffy shit girls at school talked about. All the lucky people who already found their "ones."

Billy was just stupid enough to buy into it.

At first his dad just stopped talking to him altogether, which to Billy

was ten times worse than the actual verbal abuse. He was left walking on eggshells, just waiting for the hammer to fall. And it did. A month later.

The worst part was there was no reason why. Billy didn't do anything, nothing had happened that was out of the ordinary, his father just snapped.

He was reading alone in his room when his dad practically pulled the door off its hinges. Billy didn't even have time to respond before he was pulled up and slammed against the wall. His father was screaming again, screaming those words that Billy knew the meaning of now. And then the hitting started.

The first blow struck him in the face, his dad's ring broke skin just above Billy's eyebrow. The next was a fist to the stomach. Billy tried to curl in on himself but his father kept him on his feet. This wasn't going to be one of those beatings that only lasted a few hits.

Billy was losing consciousness. The blow to the head made him feel dizzy and he was having a hard time breathing. But even through the haze Billy couldn't help but notice most of the hits were focussed on his left side, where *his* name was.

Billy didn't know why he tried to shield his soulmark from the blows. It seemed like the right thing to do, like he was protecting Steve from experiencing the abuse too.

"Steve." Billy refused to let himself think about that name, or the person it might be attached to. Whoever it was had caused him enough trouble already.

And yet here he was, Billy's world fading to black and all he could think about was "Steve." Who he might be. If he was a kinder, softer, person than Billy could ever hope to deserve. If he felt it when Billy's father beat him senseless for something his son couldn't even control.

Billy's father was still screaming abuse at him when he lost consciousness.

He woke up the next day, still clutching his side on his bedroom floor.

Billy tried to take a deep breath but found himself coughing and gasping instead.

He forced himself to stand. It took multiple attempts, but eventually he was able to lean against the wall and push himself towards the bathroom.

Billy didn't want to look himself in the mirror. He tried to tell himself it was because he didn't want to see the carnage left by his father, that he didn't want to see the swollen hues of purple and blues that marred his face.

But that wasn't the reason. Billy didn't want to look into his own eyes and see the fear and hesitation he knew he'd find. Because he knew that if he came face to face with his own guilty, begging eyes then he wouldn't have the strength to do what needed to be done.

Billy leaned against the bathroom sink as he dug around one of the cabinet drawers until he found what he was looking for.

The metal scissors felt heavy in Billy's hand. He focussed on how cold they felt in his fist as he shrugged off his shirt with a pained-wince.

His father was most likely gone at work. Billy needed to do this while there was still no one else in the house.

Billy opened the scissors and stared at the sharp metallic edges. He didn't even know if this was going to work.

There was still a lot the world didn't know about soulmarks. But one of the conclusions people seemed to draw was that they were impossible to get rid of. And yet... there were rumors. Urban legends whispered under the school bleachers.

You had to be deliberate. A soulmark wasn't just something you could write over, or scratch off. It was a part of you.

Billy pressed the tip of one of the scissors' blades next to *his* name.

He had to really mean it. He had to want it.

Billy glanced at his reflection. His face was cut and swollen. He wouldn't be able to go to school for weeks without people looking at him funny, like he was broken.

But Billy had felt broken since his dad called him a fag the first night his soulmark appeared. This wasn't anything new, he was just going to try make it survivable.

Billy dug the blade into his skin. He bit into the side of his cheek to keep himself from screaming as he sliced and tore around his soulmate's name.

It hurt like nothing before, like a limb was being amputated. Dark spots swam in front of Billy face, but he had to keep going. He couldn't keep living like this.

Blood poured down Billy's ribs and sweat dripped down his face as he continued to carve into his side.

Billy's knees began to buckle under him. He was almost finished. He could distantly feel the blade slide past the last couple letters and then circle around again, ripping Steve out of his chest.

The scissors slipped from his grasp and Billy fell to the floor along with them. He pressed his head against the cool porcelain sink, gasping for breath and ignoring the tears rolling down his face.

He wasn't finished. He could still feel Steve. Still feel the skin surrounding his soulmark attached to his ribs.

He couldn't stop now.

Billy ground his teeth together and willed the darkness out of his vision. He could do this.

Reaching up towards his ribs, Billy almost threw up when his fingers brushed against the dangling skin. His hand grew slick with his own blood as his fist formed around Steve's name.

Billy closed his eyes. He imagined a world where he could have been

happy, where he wouldn't have been so alone.

Billy imagined soft, kind eyes that belonged to someone somewhere who loved him.

And then tore his soulmark from his chest.

**Notes for the Chapter:**

heyyy

I'd apologize for the angst but...



### 3. Promise

#### Summary for the Chapter:

We're going to have a couple chapters before Steve or Billy actually meet, just to establish some things.

When Steve and Nancy first made love they did it with the lights off.

Sure, the curtains were open so there was some semblance of moonlit ambiance, but for the most part it was pitch black. Just two souls looking for warmth and meaning in each other's arms.

They took it slow, occasionally they'd shift or move in the bed, causing the moon to illuminate different aspects of themselves, and god Nancy was so beautiful.

Steve knew how lucky he was to be with her. It was rare for someone without a soulmark to find a partner. The world was so set on finding their "ones" that the people without marks were usually left in the dust, like some kind of unwanted distraction.

Steve absently wondered if Nancy saw him as that. Something to keep her preoccupied until someone better came along. She didn't seem like the type to care about stuff like that. But it was high school. Everyone was desperately trying to find themselves and the people they were destined to be with. The thought had to have crossed Nancy's mind.

His musings were interrupted when Nancy brushes her fingers against his ribcage. Steve jolted and gasped.

"Whoa-- what are you doing?" He whispered.

They were both still naked, with the bedsheet pushed down to their hips. Nancy looked startled at first, but Steve could see a smile slowly spread across her face as realization dawned.

"Are you ticklish?"

Steve really shouldn't have been flustered by that question

considering their activities earlier that evening.

“N-no.”

Nancy ran her fingers across his upper ribs again, deliberately this time, and Steve couldn't help the shriek of a laugh that escaped his lips.

“You are!” Nancy was giggling along with him now.

Steve shook his head, but he couldn't help but smile. “It's just my side, no big deal. But if you tell anyone about this I'll consider it a deep betrayal.”

Steve could hear Nancy laugh at his half-hearted warning. The mattress squeaked as she readjusted herself and the moonlight caught Nancy's silhouette as she placed a hand over her heart.

“Steve Harrington I swear to never tell a soul about your one weakness.”

Steve chuckled as he reached out to guide Nancy in for a kiss. “My hero.” He whispered.

She still faintly tasted like beer, but Steve didn't mind at all. He kind of liked it actually.

They broke away and Steve could tell Nancy was blushing again.

“So what about you?” He asked.

Nancy looked up. Her eyes widened in confusion. “Me?”

“Yeah are you ticklish? It kind of feels unfair that you know my weakness...” Steve joked as his fingers began to run across Nancy's pale skin.

They'd become well acquainted with how each other felt earlier, but this was almost more intimate. A slow searching instead of passionate desperation.

Nancy gasped and grabbed his hand when Steve's palm grazed over

her hip. Steve kept his hand there and danced his fingers across her soft skin. Her eyes lit up in the moonlight as her beautiful melodic laughter filled the room.

“Oh, you’re totally busted Nancy Wheeler.” Steve smiled.

Nancy’s hair bounced around her face as she gasped and shook her head. “You’re an idiot Steve Harrington.”

Steve brought his still captured hand to his lips and kissed Nancy’s inner-wrist. She giggled at that too. Steve wasn’t sure if it was residual laughter from before or something else. All he knew was it took his breath away.

Nancy leaned forward and kissed Steve’s forehead before she rolled over to go to sleep. They still had school tomorrow so they might as well try and get some rest.

Steve stayed awake next to her for a while longer, taking in her fragile beauty. He didn’t know how Nancy really felt about him, but Steve was beginning to fall in love with this girl. It didn’t matter if he didn’t have her name on his skin, they could make this work.

Nancy shifted in her sleep, and briefly the moon caught her delicate shoulder blade in its radiant light, and that’s when Steve saw it.

A dark shape that was normally hidden by her long beautiful hair. Someone’s name.

Steve didn’t have enough time or light to read it. But judging by the length he knew it couldn’t be his.

He felt the air leave his lungs and everything suddenly felt so cold.

Nancy had a soulmark. There was someone else in the world for her.

Steve knew he shouldn’t feel jealous. Plenty of people dated and married others that weren’t their soulmates. Nancy chose to be with Steve, not whoever’s name was scripted on her back. She might not even know who the name belonged to.

But somehow that only made Steve feel worse. What if she found her

soulmate? What if she didn't need or want Steve anymore? Where would that leave him?

Alone. Just another distraction.

Steve could feel a migraine pulsing at the back of his head. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to will away the pain and all the negative thoughts swirling around in his head.

This was ridiculous.

He loved Nancy. She probably loved him.

Their lives weren't suddenly going to change just because Steve now knew one of Nancy's secrets, a secret she probably didn't want him to know in the first place.

Steve quietly made a promise. To himself, and to Nancy. Nothing was going to change.

Steve would keep her secret and pretend that he didn't share Nancy's heart with anyone else.

Maybe eventually he'd forget that he was pretending, and they could live a happy life together.

Steve fell asleep with his hand curled around his chest, cradling his heart along with whatever fears he took with him into a deep and dream-ridden sleep.

The next morning Nancy was gone by the time Steve woke up.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

I don't know if I made it clear enough, but a person is ticklish in the same location where their soulmate's mark is located.

## 4. Finite

### Summary for the Chapter:

Holy shit this chapter just kept going! I thought about splitting it in half but I don't want to spend too much time on the years prior to season 2.

Thank you to everyone who is commenting and leaving kudos! You guys give me life!

“Where’s yours?”

“What?”

Max pointed to the name along her small forearm.

They’d gone to the beach together as a kind of “sibling bonding experience” or some other bullshit that Susan suggested. Billy’d much rather ignore his new stepsister, but she was the preferred choice over staying home with his dad.

Things had gotten better at first. Neil wanted to impress Susan. Show her how good of a father he was. How good a husband he could be.

But after the honeymoon was over he was back to his old shit. In fact Billy was sure it’d gotten worse. Like his dad was trying to beat him into being good. But at this point Billy wondered if that was even possible.

Nothing Billy did made his dad happy. Not even when he carved his soulmate’s name out of his ribs. Probably because in his father’s mind that name shouldn’t have even been there in the first place.

Neil didn’t feel that way about Max. No, his new stepdaughter had a boy’s name on her arm, *“just like little girls should .”*

For the most part Max kept it covered with jackets because honestly she was way too preoccupied with skateboarding and video games to really care about something like a soulmate. But with the hot California days sometimes multiple layers was just not realistic.

"Don't have one." Billy mouthed around his unlit cigarette as he looked out at the ocean.

Neither of them had gone in the water. Instead they walked along the shoreline.

"Oh," Max sounded disappointed. "What about that?"

Billy pushed Max away when she poked at the pale scar that was slightly visible from under his muscle tank.

After all these years it still stung.

Max stumbled in the sand. Billy ignored the way she glared at him.

"It's nothing."

"But--"

"Jesus don't you ever shut up?" Nearby seagulls screeched and flew away in surprise as Billy's voice echoed across the near-empty beach.

He hated himself when Max flinched away. But there was a bad migraine pulsing at the back of his head and all he wanted to do right now was blare loud music on his stereo and drive far far away.

"Sorry I asked." Max muttered and began to trudge ahead of Billy back towards his car.

*Nice on Hargrove.*

He kicked at the sand as he began to follow his stepsister.

They'd begun to develop a rhythm as a family unit, albeit not a healthy or normal one. Neil and Susan both worked and occasionally went out to dinner together. They stopped trying to bring the kids along after the disastrous first few attempts. Max spent most of her days at the arcade, and Billy would go wherever he pleased as long as he picked Max up and got them both home by curfew.

Billy got the sense that none of them were happy. But no one was willing to change anything for fear of disrupting what semblance of peace they'd constructed.

It wasn't anywhere close to perfect, but it was probably the closest they could get to normal.

And then Hal showed up.

Billy tried to ignore him at first. But they both played on the basketball team at school so contact was unavoidable.

Billy tried to disregard how his ears would burn or his stomach would do somersaults whenever Hal bumped into him on the court. And he would definitely ignore how the blond would somehow always manage to shower next to him after practice.

But eventually Billy began to notice how Hal would casually appear at his usual hangouts on the weekends. How Hal would always maintain eye contact a little longer than normal, or how he kept inviting Billy places.

Then he couldn't stop noticing him. Hal was beautiful. His shaggy hair shone like gold in the sun compared to Billy's more sandy locks. He had that perfect lithe athletic build and Hal's eyes could light up the night sky and his laugh...

Billy wanted to be responsible for making him laugh for the rest of his life.

They started seeing each other in secret. Hanging out whenever they could get away from their families. Listening to good music and smoking cheap cigarettes.

It was the happiest Billy had been for a long long time.

Cool hands grazed across Billy's soulmark scar.

"When are you going to tell me about this?" Hal whispered. For some reason it didn't sting as much when he touched it.

Billy looked from Hal's hand then back up to the sky. They had been lying on the hood of Billy's car watching the sunset. It was one of the rare occasions he didn't mind the normally suffocating silence.

"Long story." He murmured.

Hal nuzzled his nose into his hair. "I've got time."

"It's not a happy story." He countered.

He could feel Hal pause against him before the other boy sat up and made sure he could look Billy in the eye. His metallic earring caught the last rays of sunlight, creating a kind of halo around his silhouette.

"Babe if you think anyone's story is happy then you haven't been paying attention."

Billy looked away and sighed. He both loved and hated when Hal talked like that. How could someone be so pretentious and yet so right at the same time?

Billy took a deep breath and closed his eyes. If he was ever going to tell anyone it may as well be now.

"I used to have a soulmark but I-- I got rid of it. My dad he... I couldn't..."

Billy's mouth continued to move but the words stopped coming. He couldn't say it. Couldn't explain or excuse why anyone would want to live their lives alone and unhappy when something better was within reach.

Delicate fingers began to gently card through Billy's hair.

"What was their name?"

Billy relaxed into Hal's comforting presence. Relieved beyond words.

He wasn't going to judge him, or call him a weakling. Hal just understood.

"Steve. His name was Steve." Billy had almost forgotten how the



name felt on his lips.

Hal nodded. “Steve.” He tried the name out for himself and then tilted his head and smiled. “You ever still think about him?”

Billy shook his head against Hal’s shoulder. Thinking about Steve was still a little too painful. Like thinking about a what-if or could-have-been.

Hal nodded. His voice was ever so slightly deeper when he spoke. “When Miles died... I didn’t know what to do. It felt like my world had ended but everyone else just kept living. Like everything had turned grey and only I could see it. I was so close to just...”

Billy watched Hal’s hand unconsciously touch the faded name on the side of his neck, fingers absently grazing the small scar just under the “M”.

Billy slowly reached out and pulled his hand away from the scar and pressed Hal’s knuckles to his lips. Not kissing, just holding them, promising his presence with a divine-like reverence.

Hal let out a small laugh before kissing him on the forehead. “Miles wouldn’t have wanted my life to end just because his did. I think he’d be pretty pissed if I didn’t get the chance to meet you.”

Billy smiled and pulled Hal back to lean against the windshield of his car. They held each other for what Hal would have called a “finite eternity,” just breathing in each other’s existence along with the smoke from their forgotten-cigarettes.

Billy would sacrifice every foreseeable lifetime to remain like this.

But just like every other good thing in his life, it was doomed to be ruined.

Billy just wouldn’t have guessed it would be because of Max.

“What kind of shit are you getting into when you’re out of the house?”

His father's question came out of nowhere. They were half-way through a tense but otherwise okay dinner when Neil spoke, and Billy couldn't help but freeze.

He looked around the table, but even his dad seemed to be giving more attention to his potatoes than to him.

"Nothing." He murmured.

Neil set his fork down with a clatter and interlaced his fingers before leveling his gaze towards his son. "Billy."

"Nothing! I go to the beach or find a game going on somewhere." Billy leaned back in his seat and met his father's eyes. Neither of them were willing to break first.

"He's telling the truth." Max piped up, pushing her food around. "Sometimes he shows up to the arcade early with his friend but they don't get into trouble."

Billy's breath caught in his throat. He didn't realize Max was paying attention.

"Friend huh? Someone from school?"

Billy swallowed the lump in his throat that was threatening to choke him before answering. "Hal. From the basketball team."

Billy noticed how Neil slightly unclenched his jaw when he heard the name. *Probably scared shitless I'd found Steve*. He thought grimly to himself.

"And, what do you do with this... Hal?"

He almost couldn't help but roll his eyes. "We practice for games and shit. What? I'm not allowed to have friends anymore?"

"No that's not what we're saying, Right Neil?" Susan finally decided to pipe in.

She looked imploringly at her new husband, and Billy absently wondered what kind of woman would marry someone like his father.

Neil leaned back in his seat and shook his head. Apparently he was still trying to appease his new family. "Fine. Whatever. But if I catch you doing shit that I don't approve of--"

"Yeah I get it." Billy stood up from the table, glaring at Max before walking away. He didn't care if dinner wasn't over. He lost his appetite anyway.

Billy stayed away from Hal for a long while after that. It was safer for the both of them that way.

Too bad he didn't have a way to tell Hal that though. The guy kept tailing him whenever he could, trying to talk to Billy at his locker, on the basketball court, in the showers. It broke Billy a little having to be so cold to him. But this was his father he was talking about. The man could be watching and the thought of him finding out about Hal was... unbearable. Like losing his soulmark all over again.

But Hal was persistent, and a resourceful little bastard when he wanted to be.

Billy didn't even realize he was in the backseat of his car until he was parking at the arcade.

"Hey!" Hal sprung up from the backseat, his golden hair falling around and in front of his face in a way that Billy always found adorable. Now everything about this scene was just terrifying.

"Jesus christ!" Billy yelped. He quickly looked around to make sure no one was watching them. "What the hell?"

Hal was glaring at him. "Don't 'what the hell' me! What the hell's wrong with you! You bailed on me!"

"Keep your voice down." Billy reached out to Hal, but the other boy pulled away.

"What's going on with you? I thought we were--"

Billy's hands were balled into fists. He'd been so scared and missed

Hal so much everything was just bubbling to the surface. His leg was shaking, and at this point he couldn't tell if it was anger, anxiety, exhaustion, or an ugly cocktail of all of the above.

"It's my dad okay?" Billy bit out. "He found out about you and started asking questions. He's a total psycho and I didn't want... I couldn't let him find out about us."

Hal had completely stilled since Billy started talking. Even after Billy had finished he just stared at him. His eyebrows were scrunched up in confusion, and for the life of him Billy just wanted to kiss him he looked so adorable.

A slow cautious smile found its way across Hal's face. "So there's an 'us' huh?"

Billy wanted to laugh and scream at the same time. "Of course there's an us dumbass."

"It's just that, you stopped talking to me and I thought I was just--"

He didn't let Hal finish his thought. Billy stretched over the front seat of his car and captured his boyfriend's lip with his own.

Hal was surprise at first, but quickly melted, gripping at Billy's jacket, trying to keep them there as long as possible, completely oblivious to the rest of the world.

Eventually they broke away, resting their foreheads against each other, trying to catch their breath.

"I think I love you Billy Hargrove."

Billy smiled. Genuinely smiled. "Damn. Then I think we've got a problem,"

Hall pulled away to look at Billy. Caution and anxiety slowly rising in his beautiful brown eyes. But Billy's next words swept it all away. "because I think I love you too."

Hal choked out a laugh and playfully slapped Billy's chest. "Asshole."

“Yeah well, I’m the asshole you just professed your love to so...” Billy shrugged.

Hal rolled his eyes. “I said I *think* I love you!”

“Let’s see what I can do about convincing you...” Billy smiled and leaned in to kiss Hal again.

It was all so perfect until it wasn’t.

In the blink of an eye the driver’s side door was pulled open and Billy felt himself being torn from the car and thrown onto the rough asphalt of the parking lot. He felt the loose gravel dig into his face and the palms of his hands.

Billy looked up in a panic only to come face to face with his father.

“I get it now,” Neil kicked Billy in the ribs. “you cut off one boy’s name so you were free to fuck all of them.” Another kick to the stomach. “Huh? Is that what this is?”

“Dad--” Neil’s foot made contact with Billy’s jaw before he could say anything more. He could feel his teeth rattle and taste blood running down his throat. Things were starting to blur.

His father raised his boot to slam it down on Billy’s arm when Hal tackled him to the ground.

Hal was strong, but he didn’t stand a chance against Neil’s military training. They rolled and struggled for control, and Hal managed to get some solid hits in there, but it wasn’t long before he was pinned under Neil’s kneecap.

Hal screamed in pain as Neil dug his leg into his chest, knocking him into the concrete with each consecutive punch. His father's hits were erratic and fueled by rage. It didn't matter where his fists landed as long as they struck the teen beneath him. Billy watched through a haze as Hal's prone body convulsed when one of Neil's hits landed square in the middle of his throat.

“No...” Billy gasped.

People were starting to look now. None of them moved to step in, they just watched as an adult man beat two teenagers to a pulp. Some of the younger kids ran to the windows of the arcade, and Billy could swear he saw Max watching, terror in her eyes.

Billy struggled to his feet and lunged at his father.

“Leave him alone!” He shrieked before landing a solid punch on the side of Neil’s face.

The larger man shouted and clutched his ear, staggering away from Hal. Billy would have considered that a victory except for the fact that his boyfriend wasn’t moving.

Billy ran to him. “Hal?” He desperately called out, kneeling over his prone body.

Billy was just about to reach out and brush those golden locks out of Hal’s face when he felt himself being dragged away.

“No, no no. No!” Billy screamed as Neil threw him up against the side of the arcade. He could faintly hear sirens in the distance.

Neil grabbed fistfuls of Billy’s jacket and forced him to look him in the eye. “What did I say?”

When he didn’t respond he slammed him into the brick wall again. There’s was a ringing in Billy’s ears now, and he forced himself to look away from Hal’s body.

Neil snarled. “You live under my roof. You respect and follow my demands. Those are the rules. I will not have my son turn into some worthless fag. I’ll kill you before that happens do you understand?”

“Yes.” Billy whispered.

His father shoved further into his personal space, still not satisfied. “Yes what?”

Billy could feel tears rolling down his face. His chest felt bruised and on fire at the same time. Like it was made of hot coals and Neil was just stirring them up into a frenzy. He looked defiantly into his

father's eyes. "Yes. Sir."

Neil saw it. Knew there was something deep inside his son that was still unbroken, still mocking him.

The last thing Billy saw was his father raising his fist one last time.

Then there was only darkness.

By the time Billy woke up, he was back in his bed and the sun was gone.

He had no idea how long he'd been unconscious, but judging by how his ribs and face felt it was the same day.

People were shouting somewhere in the house, probably about him and Hal.

*Hal!* Billy jolted up, wincing at the sudden pain it caused him.

What had happened after he blacked out? He remembered his dad... Hal not moving... the sirens.

He had to go. He had to find Hal.

It was excruciating trying to get out of bed, let alone crawl out his bedroom window.

Billy almost made it to his car when he heard footsteps behind him. He twisted around just in time to see Max halt in her steps a few feet away from where he was standing.

Her cheeks were red, and Billy couldn't tell if it was from the running or if she'd been crying.

"I'm-- I'm sorry I'm so sorry Billy." She whispered. They could still hear their parents yelling from the house.

"What happened?" It was difficult for Billy to form words. Half of his face felt swollen from earlier.

Max shook her head and looked up, trying to halt any tears from falling.

“I screwed up I shouldn’t have said anything at dinner and I’m--”

Her mouth snapped shut when Billy held up a hand. “What happened?”

Max’s mouth opened and closed again. “You mean about Neil or--?”

“Hal! Max what happened to Hal after I got knocked out? Is he okay?”

There was an ugly silence between them. Max wouldn’t look him in the eye anymore and instead stuffed her fists deeper into her jacket pockets.

Billy’s voice broke. “Max tell me he’s okay.”

Her long red hair swung as Max shook her head. Eventually she pulled something out of her pocket and slowly pressed it into Billy’s empty palm.

It was Hal’s earring. It must have fallen out when...

“The ambulance and the cops came but... he was gone before they could do anything.”

Her words almost didn’t register as Billy stared at the small piece of jewelry in his hand.

She had to be lying. There was no way Hal was dead. Billy would have felt it.

*It wasn’t supposed to end like this .* He wanted to scream.

Isn’t that what everybody said? But maybe that’s just how life was for Billy. Maybe he was meant to suffer. And lose. And break until there’s nothing left. Until the only thing Billy had left was anger. It was like a fire. Destructive. But also the only thing keeping Billy from feeling nothing at all. The only thing keeping him from giving up altogether.



But anger was a terrible thing to hold onto. Because you could only let it consume yourself for so long before it had to be fed something else. Someone else to blame.

Billy hated and blamed his father. He hated all those people that didn't step in and just let Hal die. He hated Max for starting all of this.

"Get away from me." Billy growled. Except it didn't sound like him. It sounded deeper. Like rage. Like something in pain.

"What?" Max leaned closer, moving to help Billy to his feet.

"I said get the hell away from me!" Billy shrieked and shoved Max backwards. She fell on her ass, her hands broke her fall but got cut up by the gravel for her trouble.

Billy stood on his own. He ignored his little sister and the tears welling up in her eyes. Instead he climbed into his car and drove away.

Billy didn't remember the rest of the night. He just remembered driving, trying to drown out everything with loud angry music that Hal would have hated. But it didn't matter. None of it mattered. Because Hal wasn't here anymore.

And it was all his fault.

Billy and his family moved to Hawkins shortly after that.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

I'm so sorry.

## 5. Remember

*Like we're in love.*

Those words rattled in Steve's head as he stumbled out of the bathroom.

*Like we're in love.*

Nancy didn't love him. She was pretending. Just like they'd been pretending that everything was fine after last year. When Steve found out that monsters were real and Jonathan and Nancy were soulmates.

It wasn't pretending for him though. He loved Nancy with all his heart. He wanted to stay in Hawkins for her senior year for God's sake.

Steve's stomach twisted when he remembered telling her about getting a job with his dad. About the work benefits and saving up money like he was some kind of 50s suburban husband.

Had Nancy been pretending all along? Was any of that real for her? Or was she just letting him dream until she was done playing house?

Steve pushed through the crowd of drunk sweaty teenagers. They were having the time of their lives, completely oblivious to anything but themselves. None of them were going to fall asleep to nightmares of giant faceless monsters and broken hearts. Steve wanted to throw up.

*Like we're in love.*

A hand gripped his shoulder and drunkenly tugged him to a halt.

"Harrington! Where are you going? The party's just getting started!"

Tommy's voice was barely audible.

Steve stared at his old friend and blinked, trying to calm down enough to come up with a decent answer. It wasn't like Tommy actually cared though. He just liked to make a spectacle of everything

whenever he could. And it was working. A few other party-goers were staring at him, including the new guy. What had Tommy called him? Was it Billy?

That name felt familiar for some reason. Billy. The new Keg King. Tommy's new leader.

And honestly he was free to that title. He'll find out soon enough Tommy was a pain in the ass.

But there was something about Billy that made Steve feel dizzy. Like when you try to read a book in a moving car and the words don't quite make sense.

Maybe it was just the alcohol, or Nancy's words still digging into his heart. But Steve felt his body vibrating with energy. From the hair standing on the back of his neck down to the soles of his feet.

Tommy and Billy were still staring at him.

"I've gotta... I'm heading out."

As Steve tried to move towards the door he bumped into Jonathan. Of course he would appear now.

They made eye contact and Steve could see Jonathan look around for Nancy. Because that's who he really came to see. They'd reconciled since last year, but Steve wasn't sure if they'd ever actually be friends.

Steve raised his voice so Jonathan could hear him.

"Can you give her a ride home?" He jerked his head towards the bathroom.

Steve didn't wait to watch Jonathan's eyes light up and turn all his attention towards looking for Nancy.

He didn't want to see anyone else lose interest in him for someone better.

Steve had almost reached his car before he looked back.

The house was still pounding with music and teenage desperation. It reminded him of standing outside the Byers house last year. Watching the lights flicker with energy and debating whether to run or stay and fight. That was the night everything changed. But tonight all Steve wanted to do was run. There was no one that needed or wanted him. Life continued on, and no one missed him or noticed his absence.

A small ember of light caught Steve's eye. Billy, the new kid, was smoking just outside the house. Stationary like a rock amidst the sea of teenagers wading past him to get inside. Steve could almost swear he was staring straight at him. Like he was looking for something.

He couldn't quite shake the feeling the entire drive home.

It was like Steve had forgotten something and Billy was waiting for him to remember.

Steve didn't even stop to take his shoes off before he collapsed onto his bed. The remaining adrenaline and anger had completely faded and all he was left with was loneliness.

Steve reached his arm across the bed where Nancy occasionally slept. It was cold and empty. Was it worth loving Nancy at all if this was how it was going to end? Had Steve been lying to himself ever since he saw the soulmark on her shoulder? Trying to convince himself it wasn't going to end in heartbreak?

He withdrew his hand and pressed his palms against his closed eyes, willing the tears away. Sometimes, people just end up alone.

Steve kicked off his shoes and began to shrug off his clothes. He debated taking a shower but honestly that sounded like too much work for where he was at right now.

His body was on auto-pilot as he crossed his legs to pull off his socks.

He would shower in the morning and clear his head, then he and Nancy would talk on the drive to sch...

Steve froze as he dropped his sock and stared at the name on the bottom of his left foot.

And then it hit him.

Like when you remember the lyrics to a song you haven't heard in years.

Familiarity flooded back.

Holy shit.

Steve clutched at his foot and read the name over and over again.

Billy. *Billy?*

It couldn't possibly be that Billy right? The guy who forged his way through the crowded party just to look Steve in the eye and not say a damn thing? The guy who made Steve feel dizzy and watched him like he'd forgotten something?

"Oh my god." Steve whispered.

Did Billy know he was Steve's soulmate? Did that mean Steve was his?

With the pad of his thumb, Steve rubbed at the letters on the sole of his foot. But the name didn't smudge or disappear.

Steve's heart was pounding in his chest.

What the hell did any of this mean? Should he say something? Tell someone?

*Like who?* He thought glummly.

Nancy was probably being carried home by Jonathan right now, and Billy...

Steve didn't even know if he wanted to talk to Billy about this.

His world just kept getting flipped upside down and Steve didn't know what he wanted at this point.

Steve looked down at the name on his sole and gently traced the letters with his fingers.

His stomach felt like it was in knots.

“Billy...” Steve whispered the name to himself.

What if he told him and Billy wasn't his soulmate? What if he was?

That thought was almost as terrifying as the possibility of not having a soulmate altogether.

Steve stuffed his feet under the covers on his bed and tossed and turned, trying to fall asleep. But the memory of sharp blue eyes and the smell of cigarettes kept him up well into the early morning.

Sometimes life really could be bullshit.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

I've been taking poetry and abstract fiction classes the past couple semesters and I'm still trying to get out of that writing habit. But I still feel like it's bleeding into this fic.

Thank you all for commenting and talking with me. you all are so wonderful and I hope you're enjoying this so far.

## 6. Cheated

### Notes for the Chapter:

So in just a couple days school will officially be over for me and I am both overjoyed and exhausted.

As things are slowing down for me, I wanted to thank everyone who has read, commented, and left kudos on this fic so far. I've never been a part of a fandom that was so active and supportive of each other and I'd love to get to know you all better.

Your patience and support for this work means the world to me and I'm happy you are all here!

Thank you again! <3

“What’s his problem?” Billy jerked his head in the direction of Harrington’s retreating form.

Tommy hummed as he drank from a red party cup. He was already pretty hammered and was definitely going to have a killer headache in the morning.

“Harrington? Who knows. Probably had a fight with his princess or something.”

“Girlfriend?” Billy didn’t know why that information disappointed him. He didn’t actually know anything about the guy aside from when Tommy talked about him.

But Harrington was one of the first people Billy saw on his initial day in Hawkins. And from the first moment he saw him in the school parking lot, Billy couldn’t get Harrington out of his mind. He was undeniably gorgeous, but there was just something else about him too...

It felt like Billy had lived his entire life inside a stuffy cramped room and someone finally opened a window.

Everytime he caught sight of the dark-eyed boy Billy couldn’t help but be drawn to him. Like he had something to prove, or something

owed.

Maybe there was just a small part of him that hoped that Harrington swung that way. But who was he kidding. This was the backwoods of Indiana, and Harrington had a girlfriend.

Tommy's laugh pulled Billy from his thoughts. "For now at least. Me and Carol have a bet to see how long it takes before they split."

Billy frowned. "They fight a lot or something?"

Tommy's drink sloshed and threatened to spill as he shook his hand. "Nah, Dude. Steve's just not her soulmate is all."

Billy's heart leapt into his throat. He hadn't heard Harrington's first name until now. It couldn't possibly...

Billy licked his lips, trying to keep calm. "What?"

"Yeah Harrington doesn't have a soulmark. What a freak, right?"

And just like that it felt like the floor was ripped out from under him again.

Billy tried to swallow the lump in his throat. The odds of him coming across his soulmate were so slim but god, the way he felt when he looked at Harrington before he even knew his name was... He just had to get his hopes up didn't he.

Billy shrugged and cleared his throat. "Nah man, we don't care about shit like that on the coast."

He took swig of whatever was in his party cup, making it sound like most people in California didn't have a soulmark. Which was total bullshit, but Tommy ate it up.

Billy set his cup down on a coffee table littered with spilled drinks and half-empty cups. "I'm gonna go smoke."

Tommy nodded and laughed. "Cool!"

Billy couldn't quite decide if the kid actually heard him or was just



playing along. And honestly he didn't care.

Pushing through the crowd, Billy wasn't even out the front door before a cigarette was lit and between his lips.

Teenagers were still showing up and trying to push inside the house. But they were all just background noise to Billy.

He was only looking for one person as he scanned the moonlit crowd.

Billy spotted Steve by his hair first. The teen's almost defeated walk was so stark compared to the excited bounce that he was strutting earlier.

Steve was almost to his car and all Billy wanted was for him to turn around. To look back.

For some reason, being able to look into Steve's eyes felt like the only thing that ever mattered.

*Turn around!*

Steve looked back as if he read Billy's mind. For the briefest of moments those soft brown eyes met his cold blue ones. That was all it took for Billy to know.

That was Steve. His Steve. His soulmate.

Weren't they supposed to have a moment? Some kind of familiarity? Or was that just a fairytale Billy wanted so desperately to believe.

Steve climbed into his car and began to drive away.

There was a second where Billy considered chasing after him. Pulling Steve out of the vehicle so he could stare into those warm eyes just a little bit longer and so much closer.

But what would he say?

What if Steve didn't feel the same faint pull that made Billy feel so unbearably warm inside?

*Steve Harrington didn't have a soulmark.*

That's what Tommy said.

None of Billy's life had been fair up to this point. Should he really be surprised that the universe would cheat him of this too?

Billy's heart didn't stop pounding for the rest of the night. He tried to drown it out with cheap beer, and the music's pulsing bassline helped bury the beating in his own chest. But not completely.

When he was stretched out on his bed that night Billy found himself running his thumb along the slightly raised stretch of skin where Steve's name used to be. It was paler compared to the rest of his tanned complexion, like white paint used to cover the graffiti back in California.

That's what Steve's name felt like at first. Something the rest of the world saw as dirty. Something that needed to be erased.

But Billy loved graffiti. And he felt so naked when he first cut Steve out of his life.

Maybe this was his fault. Maybe Steve's soulmark disappeared when Billy sliced his own away. Maybe that's why Steve didn't feel the same magnetic pull.

Because Billy ruined it for the both of them.

Billy dug his nails into the scarred flesh above his ribs and dragged them across his chest. Of course he'd screw this up.

If he'd just held on a little longer then maybe tonight would have gone differently. He and Steve might have actually connected instead of just passing through each other's atmosphere like aimless comets.

But if Steve didn't have a soulmark then none of this mattered anyway.

Maybe they were always destined to be some kind of sick cosmic

joke. A pathetic almost, instead of a beautiful eternity.

Billy could feel hot tears tumbling down the sides of his face, dampening the pillow his head was resting on.

He could feel that burning anger simmering behind his ribs again.

Except now Billy wasn't sure if he wanted to fight it anymore.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

(If any of you are interested my sideblog on tumblr is harringrovecryptid)

## 7. Bullshit

### Notes for the Chapter:

Aaaand I'm back! I kind of wanted to take a break from writing because that's all I've been doing for school and I was kind of struggling writing this chapter but hopefully you guys like it. I've definitely found I enjoy writing from Billy's perspective more for some reason. But Steve is great too.

Thank you again to everyone who's commented so far. You all are awesome!

Steve didn't feel like he was in control of his body for the first half of the day. It felt like everything was stuck behind a haze or when the windshield of your car gets fogged over while you drive.

But by the look of Tommy and some of the other kids who were at last night's party, he wasn't the only one feeling like shit.

Steve just wished it was because of a hangover for him.

Nancy distantly came to mind. She might just be feeling as terrible as he was. But maybe that was just wishful thinking. The thought that maybe someone was feeling just as miserable as him was a comforting one. Although it was probably just another lie Steve had told himself. He seemed to do that a lot.

Probably because it was easier than dealing with all the anxiety that normally coiled around his chest.

The kind of anxiety that made it difficult to function. The kind that reminded Steve that with each passing hour he was getting closer and closer to gym class. Where *he'd* be.

Billy was already distracting before Steve remembered he was his soulmate. Now he felt like an itch that was just out of reach. Something you couldn't forget even if you tried.

Maybe it was the universe getting back at Steve for forgetting he

even had a soulmate.

The plan was to avoid him during gym. But then coach decided they should play shirts vs skins and Billy became a lot harder to ignore.

His copper-toned body had a thin sheen of sweat from playing, and the light beaming through the windows almost made Billy glow like the sun. A flame that Steve felt himself being drawn to like a moth.

He'd catch himself staring. Looking for...

Steve didn't want to admit what he was looking for. Because he was too scared of what would happen, what choices he'd have to make if he saw his name on Billy's skin.

As much as people liked to think they had control in life, Steve knew that there was only so much you could do to defy destiny.

A warm body pressed into Steve's back and suddenly his heart was trying to leap out of his chest. "Harrington right?"

Steve instinctively jerked back. He could feel Billy's breath on his neck, tickling the back of his ear and...

"Word on the street is you used to run this school. King Steve's what they used to call you."

Billy was keeping himself flat against Steve, knocking into him again and again, like when you strike two rocks together trying to get a spark.

But Steve already felt like he was on fire.

"--Then you turned bitch."

Billy had to know. There was no way this was just some stupid basketball game.

Steve ground his teeth together, trying to ignore the way Billy emphasized that last word.

“Maybe you should just shut up and play the game.”

He could feel Billy chuckle in his ear. The next thing Steve knew he was lying on his back and the other team was up 2 points.

Billy was grinning across the court, his tongue poking out tauntingly.

Steve climbed to his feet and tried to catch his breath. Could this day get any worse?

“Steve?” A strong feminine voice rang across the room.

Apparently it could.

Steve looked over his shoulder. Nancy looked better than he felt. But that wasn't saying much. He could still see her visibly wince from the brightly lit gym.

Steve could ignore the taunts and teases from Tommy and some of the other boys as he followed Nancy outside. What he couldn't ignore was the feeling of Billy's eyes following his every move. Steve could still feel them dragging across his frame even after he got outside.

Nancy didn't remember. Of course she didn't remember.

Apparently Steve was right in his theory that the universe was making up for lost time in the “make Harrington regret ever forgetting his soulmate” department.

“--You got mad at me because I was drunk...” Steve struggled to swallow a scoff as Nancy attempted to recap last night. Of course she'd remember it that way.

“...And then you took me home.”

He couldn't help but laugh. “No,” Steve balled his hands up around the towel across his shoulders. “That was your other boyfriend. That was Jonathan.”

Nancy frowned. “I don't understand...”

She didn't even try to correct or deny the "other boyfriend" comment. Steve felt a lump forming in his throat.

"It's pretty simple Nancy you were just telling it like it is."

"What?"

Steve could feel his patience and composure slipping. He cleared his throat, trying to calm down but the words just started to spill out.

"Apparently... we killed Barb and I don't care because I'm bullshit..."

Steve tried to shrug away the croak in his voice as that word crossed his lips.

"And our whole... our whole relationship is bullshit and..."

Steve looked away from Nancy as he mock-counted all the bullshit that apparently surrounded their lives.

"I mean pretty much everything is bullshit, bullshit, bullshit..."

This wasn't fair, he knew. But at this point Steve was too tired to care.

"Oh yeah, also!" Steve looked her in the eyes again. "You don't love me."

Nancy looked dizzy, sick even. But there was familiarity there too. Masked by the stubborn will that Steve fell in love with a little over a year ago.

She shook her head. "I was drunk Steve. I don't remember any of that."

Not good enough.

Steve didn't care if their voices carried at this point. He could already feel kids glancing at them from the field. "So that makes everything you said just bullshit too?"

"Yes!" Nancy vehemently nodded her head as if it was obvious.

Steve wanted so desperately for that to be true. Everything would be so much easier if you weren't responsible for the things you forget. But the soulmark burning a hole into the bottom of Steve's foot suggested otherwise. A soulmate doesn't stop being a soulmate just because you ignore them. Sometimes you can't fight what's already been predetermined.

"Then tell me!"

"Tell you what?"

Steve could feel his heart crumble like wood after a fire.

Did she really not know?

"You love me." His voice was close to a whisper, laced with desperation. If anyone could defy destiny, or convince him it was even possible, it would be Nancy Wheeler. If she told him she loved him... Maybe they would be alright.

But she couldn't say it. Steve could see it in her eyes. He could see Nancy realize it too.

If they weren't meant to be together, if this was all inevitable, then why did his chest hurt so much?

Maybe this was both of their faults. They were just two kids who were trying to defy the universe and ignore something that was as unchangeable as the stars.

Except Steve had just been lying to himself. Nancy knew. She knew who her soulmate was this whole time.

She couldn't even look in his eyes anymore.

Steve shook his head and began to walk towards the gym. Away from Nancy. Away from the words left unspoken, hanging in the air like ugly cobwebs.

"I think you're bullshit."



## 8. The Shower Scene

### Notes for the Chapter:

Merry early Christmas and Happy Holidays to you all! We finally made it to the infamous shower scene! Thank you all again so much for your wonderful responses to this story! I love and appreciate each and every one of you and hope you have an amazing day!

And if this holiday season is shrouded in sadness or loneliness for some of you then know that you are in my heart and I'll be thinking of you these upcoming days.

Every gym class suddenly offered a whole new challenge for Billy.

Basketball was easy. He could do it in his sleep and honestly most of these Hawkins kids were nowhere close to the boys he competed against back in California.

Getting close to Steve though? Close enough to feel that connection just humming beneath the surface. Close enough to search for Billy's own name on his skin. Now that was a challenge.

He hadn't found it yet, but if there was even a chance it was there Billy was going to keep looking. Maybe under that worn gym shirt, or somewhere beneath his shorts...

Billy had to stop himself from imagining his name printed along Steve's hip bone, or in other more intimate areas that someone else might have missed.

He briefly wondered if Steve's mark was on his ribs too. If they had matched at one point in their lives, before Billy screwed up.

But that's something Tommy and the other kids would have noticed in the gym showers.

*Steve Harrington didn't have a soulmark.*

That wasn't true. Billy refused to believe it.

There had to be a reason for all the shit and suffering he'd endured his whole life. And if all of it meant he got someone as good and beautiful as Steve Harrington for a soulmate then it would have been worth it.

Steve had left early the other day after Nancy showed up. He was clearly upset and there was a new part of Billy that desperately wanted to know why. But that was a weird thing to ask a total stranger, so Billy was left with unresolved frustration.

Partially because Steve leaving gym early meant Billy didn't get a chance to see him in the showers, which probably sounded bad when he thought about it, but didn't make it any less true.

The showers were the one place Billy could try and really look Harrington over. There were no clothes or dorky halloween costumes to hide behind.

Which is why gym became one of the only things Billy looked forward too since he and Max moved to this absurdly small town.

Billy couldn't help the laugh that escaped his lips as Steve shoved into him on the court, trying to steal the basketball Billy was casually dribbling in one hand.

"I like this, you're playing tough today." Billy egged him on, taking advantage of the fact that all of Steve's energy was focussed on him.

He didn't fail to notice how Steve's eyes caught on his scar, and for the briefest of moments it looked like Steve was trying to solve a puzzle before giving up.

"Jesus do you ever stop talking? Come on!" The frustration in his voice never changed how soft those eyes were.

If they were alone, if there was nobody else in the gym and they weren't in the middle of a game, Billy would happily brush the hair out of Steve's face and stare into those eyes forever.

But it had already been too long, and Billy couldn't quite ignore his competitive nature. So he did what made the most sense at the time. He checked Harrington so hard that Steve ended up on his back again.

It was a nice look for him. Billy wished he could get Steve on his back for different reasons other than gym class. But those thoughts were for another time.

Billy offered his hand to Steve. He tried not to react to the bolt of electricity that shot up his arm when they touched, but it was so addicting and Billy wanted more.

He yanked Steve up, pulling him into Billy's personal space.

"You were moving your feet." he whispered. Trying to hold onto the other boy for as long as possible.

There was a spark of fear in Steve's eyes, and Billy wasn't exactly sure why. But he had Harrington's undivided attention now, and Steve wasn't pulling away.

"Plant them next time. Draw a charge." Billy shoved Steve onto the ground again. He had a reputation to uphold in the school and not even those Bambi eyes would change that.

Billy could almost hear Steve's heart pounding as he walked away towards the showers. Sure, maybe he'd been a little rough, but that was normal for any sport. Harrington shouldn't be that surprised unless...

Billy flexed his hand. It still tingled from the contact with Steve. They'd touched plenty of times on the court, but this felt different. Stronger.

He'd read a book about soulmarks once. It was mostly just unconfirmed theories and shit, but one of the chapters was dedicated to studying the connection between a soulmate bond and emotion. Again, most of it was total bullshit or completely incomprehensible at the time, but it seemed to come to the conclusion that the stronger the feelings the stronger the bond.

Billy thought of the fear in Steve's eyes the minute their hands touched. Had that made a difference?

Should that be his approach? Just pushing Steve until the other boys feels *something* for him?

It was certainly worth a shot...

Billy took his time undressing in the locker room. He was waiting for Steve. Waiting to make sure they were next to each other in the showers.

The brunette shuffled in a few minutes later, and Billy tried to causally push past Tommy and the other boys to guarantee a spot next to Harrington.

At this point Billy was bordering desperation and he knew it. But he still couldn't help but grin as Steve settled on one of the showers in the far-end corner of the room. This was going to make things a lot easier.

Billy tried to casually look him over as Steve closed his eyes against the stream of hot water coming from the showerhead.

There was a sprinkling of freckles across his back, and with ample time Billy would map them out like constellations. But he wasn't looking for stars right now.

As his gaze began to fall lower the sound of a third showerhead turning on interrupted Billy's mission. He averted his eyes and looked across at the third person invading their privacy.

Of-fucking-course it would be Tommy.

At this point Billy was wondering how Steve had managed to stay friends with this kid for so long because honestly he was starting to grate on Billy's nerves and it hadn't even been a week yet.

Billy cleared his throat and looked at Steve, who was resolutely staring anywhere but in his direction. Rude. It's not like Billy pushed

him that hard.

“Don’t sweat it Harrington,” He offered in what Billy hoped was a casual but comforting tone. “today’s just not your day man.” Steve still didn’t look at him.

Billy turned off his water but stayed where he was. He half-heartedly made a show of toweling himself off in case anyone got suspicious, but the majority of Billy’s attention was focussed on scouring Steve’s body for a soulmark.

His name wasn’t on Steve’s ribs. And Billy would be lying if he said he wasn’t a little disappointed at that.

He almost forgot Tommy was still there until the other kid started talking. And even then it took Billy a few seconds to really process what he was saying.

--you and the Princess break off for one day and she’s already running off with the freak’s brother.”

Billy hated how quick Steve was to make eye contact with Tommy. It sent an unfamiliar bolt of jealousy through his chest. He should never have to envy someone like Tommy.

“Jonathan and the Princess skipped yesterday and still haven’t shown.” the other boy finished with a grin, watching the new information take a toll on his audience.

Steve unconsciously shrank away from his old friend as if his words caused him physical pain. He looked so small and vulnerable and honestly all Billy wanted was to bash Tommy’s mouth in for intentionally hurting Steve like that.

“But that must be a coincidence, right?” Tommy saw the damage he caused and laughed as he walked away to towel himself off.

Steve shouldn’t be so open, so honest, with how he felt. It was easier for people to hurt him. He continued to look at his feet, clearly upset but not wanting to show it.

“Don’t take it too hard man.” Billy tried to offer.

In his personal opinion this was fantastic news. If it was true Steve and Nancy were over then that meant Billy was free to try and step in.

“A pretty boy like you’s got nothing to worry about.” Even Billy could hear how faint his voice sounded amidst the running water. He nervously shifted on his feet and cleared his throat, trying to recover.

“Plenty of bitches in the sea.” He added with a voice closer to his regular growl.

Steve still hadn’t looked at him. He just continued to massage shampoo in his hair.

Billy felt frustration begin to simmer beneath his skin. He didn’t like the feeling of being ignored, especially by Steve. But he tried to choke it down by continuing to search for his name of Harrington’s skin.

It wasn’t on his back or chest. He hadn’t seen any mark on Steve’s arms out on the court... Maybe his legs?

The more Billy looked the more that frustration started to boil into anger.

He couldn’t find it.

But if his name wasn’t there then why did Billy feel that undercurrent of warmth and electricity whenever he got close to Steve?

Sometimes, if you were really unlucky, your soulmate didn’t have your name tattooed on their skin. That’s what Billy had been told at school. He just stubbornly refused it would happen to him.

After all he’d been through...

Billy had just been stupid enough to believe it had all been for a reason.

Steve Harrington didn’t have a soulmark.

Why did Billy think he could prove anyone wrong, especially

whatever cruel god is listening.

Just when Billy thought life was getting better. When he had the chance of happiness. When he thought all this suffering had been for a reason...

Billy turned off Steve's water while his face was still slathered in soap and shampoo.

"Am I right?"

Steve looked at him then. Well, more like stared in utter annoyance, but Billy would take what he could get.

He wasn't going to let this beat him.

"I'll be sure to leave you some."

Billy grinned and slapped Steve's arm and once again received a bolt of electricity for his troubles. Except this time it wasn't warm or intoxicating. It felt unbearably, raging hot, and only made Billy quicken his pace towards the rest of the locker room.

He heard the shower turn on again behind him, and Billy briefly considered turning back and doing... something.

That warm tug that he used to feel around Harrington started to feel more like an ugly noose around Billy's neck.

What was the point of being good or trying to be good to Steve if they weren't meant to be together? It's not like Steve seemed all that interested in being friends. After today it felt more like Harrington was scared of him than anything else.

Billy might as well embrace that.

And if it meant pushing and shoving Harrington around the court like a child on the playground, then so be it.

Billy had survived this long without Steve in his life, why should anything change now?

## **Notes for the Chapter:**

Believe it or not, one of my favorite genres to write is comedy.

Also! After writing this chapter it kind of hit me how EARLY Billy turned off his shower in the episode and then proceeded to STAY there. There's really no good heterosexual excuse for that kind of behavior.



## 9. Distract

### Notes for the Chapter:

I'm back!!!

Steve really wished he could put his life on pause. Even just a minute would feel like an oasis amidst the desert. Or a Modern English song amidst Metallica.

He couldn't stop thinking about Nancy. About Billy. About the goddamn soulmark on the bottom of his foot and what he should do about it. His head felt like a skipping record, except it just kept jumping from one anxiety-inducing thought to the other.

He couldn't forget or ignore Billy. And it certainly felt like the boy in question wasn't going to let Steve even attempt that anymore.

The more paranoid part of him still believed Billy somehow knew. But if that was true he'd probably be doing more than just harassing him at gym.

Maybe Billy was scared too. They had reason for it right?

Statistically speaking there had to be other people in Hawkins whose soulmate was the same gender. But there was a reason no one ever heard about them.

All the Reagan signs Steve drove past were a nauseating reminder of that.

In the eyes of the general public it was bad enough for a boy to "choose" to be with another boy. But for them to have the audacity to be soulmates, despite the fact that choice had nothing to do with it...

Maybe Billy was disgusted by their bond and that's why he hadn't said anything.

It would certainly explain why Billy seemed to single out and harass Steve every chance he got. But that wouldn't explain the look of

hunger in his eyes.

Hell, Steve still didn't know if he was *Billy's* soulmate. He certainly hadn't seen his name anywhere on the blond's skin. And Billy showed a *lot* of skin.

Steve was kicking himself for not trying to get a better look at the other teen in the showers after gym. The only defining mark he caught sight of was that scar on Billy's rib.

It wasn't like any scar Steve had seen before, like when you skin your knee or get your appendix removed. It reminded him of the White-Out marks Nancy would use on her essays, hiding away mistakes.

Steve shook his head. He was never good at trying to figure this kind of stuff out. It was like looking at a puzzle that was made up of pieces that didn't quite fit right.

He turned up the radio as he drove, trying to drown out his own thoughts.

The red roses in the passenger seat shook until he pulled up at the Wheeler's house.

At this point he didn't really know what he was doing.

Steve gripped the flowers in one hand and mulled over something, anything to say to Nancy to try and make this better.

"I love you... I'm sorry... Sorry. What the hell am I sorry for?" Steve murmured to himself as he ran his free hand through his hair.

Because honestly what the hell *was* he sorry for? Sorry for trying to look out for Nancy so she wouldn't get totally wasted? Sorry for trying to help her forget that there are literal monsters in the woods? Sorry for being bullshit?

A stubborn part of Steve didn't want to say sorry. He wanted to hear it. He was so tired of just pretending to be okay. Like none of this crazy shit bothered him. Like it didn't feel like his heart was crumbling like clay when Nancy didn't seem aware or sorry at all that she hurt him.

Because Steve was just supposed to take that shit. And any bitterness on his side just made him in the wrong.

Sorry they weren't meant to be together? Sorry that Nancy knew that and Steve didn't?

Maybe Steve was just scared of losing Nancy. As a girlfriend. As a friend. He didn't have a lot of those lately.

A more desperate part of him wanted to tell her everything just so he'd have someone to talk to. The record was playing in his head again except it wasn't just skipping. It was scratching. Begging for someone to pull the needle away and set everything right.

Steve could feel his chest tighten and his breath quicken--

"Hey!" Someone's voice cut through the cold November morning.

Steve looked up to see one of Mike's friends jogging towards him. What was this one's name? Dusty? Dustin. Steve was pretty sure it was Dustin. Whichever kid it was, he looked just about as tired and desperate as Steve felt.

Dustin pointed an accusing finger at him. "Are those for either Mr. or Mrs. Wheeler?"

Steve followed Dustin's gesture to the flowers in his hand. He subconsciously pulled them to his chest almost protectively. "...No they're for..."

"Good." Dustin snatched the flowers out of Steve's grasp and began walking towards his car.

"Hey!" Steve reached out, trying to grab them back but the kid was too fast. "What the Hell?"

"Nancy isn't home." Dustin huffed as either an explanation or an afterthought. He really couldn't decide.

"Where is she?" Steve's heart tightened at the thought that she might already be with Jonathan.

“Doesn’t matter.” Dustin didn’t stop. Didn’t even look back. He just continued to trudge towards Steve’s BMW. “We have bigger problems than your love life.”

Steve knew he should probably feel bothered by how casually Dustin opened the car door and prepared to get inside. But at this point he was already so confused and frustrated with literally everything else in his life that this new development felt pretty par for the course.

Dustin turned around. “Do you still have that bat?”

Steve shrugged his shoulders. “Bat? What bat?”

“The one with the nails?” Dustin dramatically waved the flowers around.

“Why?” Because honestly how did Dustin know about the bat? Steve sure as hell never told any of the kids. Maybe Nancy or Jonathan mentioned it to Mike or Will. Steve didn’t really know what siblings talked about.

“I’ll explain on the way.” Dustin turned and crawled into the passenger’s seat.

Steve’s feet began to move before his mouth caught up with him. “Now?”

“Now!” Dustin called back.

Steve sighed as he ran towards the driver’s side of his car. What was he doing? He came here to try and get things back to normal, at the very least with Nancy.

Now he was running into what sounded like just more trouble with a kid he barely knew that seemed all too comfortable ordering him around.

But as Steve turned the radio down as they pulled out of the Wheeler’s neighborhood, he became aware that the record in his mind wasn’t scratching anymore.

Whatever help or trouble this Dustin kid was pulling him into had

become a distraction to the rest of Steve's chaotic life. And maybe that was a good thing.

"You should buckle up." Dustin stated as he fastened his own seatbelt.

"Oh my god." Steve mumbled under his breath.

Possible giant lizard aside, Steve had to admit he was having an okay time hanging out with Dustin.

The kid meant well. He was just kind of hopeless when it came to certain things like love and relationships. Steve could relate to that.

"Alright let me get this straight," He threw another chunk of meat onto the train tracks. "You kept something you knew was probably dangerous in order to impress a girl, who you just met?"

"Alright, that's grossly oversimplifying things." Dustin muttered from a few feet ahead.

Steve really didn't think it was though. Because that's exactly what happened.

"I mean why would a girl like some nasty slug anyway?"

"An interdimensional slug? Because it's awesome!" Dustin dropped another piece of meat. They had been doing this for a little over an hour now.

Steve shook his head. This poor kid had no idea how to impress girls.

"I don't know man, I think maybe you're trying too hard."

He could hear Dustin huff in annoyance before he spoke. "Not everyone can have your perfect hair, alright?"

"It's not about the hair man." Steve rolled his eyes.

Because really how did it come to this? How did he find himself in

the middle of the woods giving advice to an eighth-grader while leaving a trail of food behind them like some kind of warped Grimm Brother's Tale?

"The key with girls is just acting like you don't care."

Dustin had slowed his pace to the point where they were walking alongside each other. "Even if you do?"

"Yeah exactly. It drives him nuts." He looked at the path ahead of them. The tracks seemed to go on forever and he vaguely wondered where exactly they were headed.

Steve thought of Nancy, and how he couldn't pretend like he didn't care about her, like he did with all the other girls. He had climbed through windows and stolen her flashcards just to be close to her.

Just like Billy had pushed through crowds at the Halloween party and teased him on the basketball court, just to try and get his attention.

A chunk of meat slipped from Steve's hand in dawning realization. Had Billy been flirting with him this entire time?

"And then what?" Dustin snapped Steve out of his trance.

"You just wait until uh..." Steve turned away, throwing another piece behind him as an excuse to recover. "Till you feel it."

"Feel what?"

Steve swallowed hard and thought about how Nancy made him feel. She was warmth and comfort. A gentle reprieve in a harsh world.

But that doesn't really feel like what they're talking about here.

Steve thought about his soulmark. "It's like before it's gonna storm, you know?" He threw another piece of meat behind him and remembered when Billy gripped his hand in gym. The energy that shot through his arm sent a bolt of fear straight to Steve's heart. "You can't see it but you can feel it like this uh... Electricity?"

But it wasn't all fear. There was a warm, fuzzy aftershock. And it made Steve feel more safe and alive than he'd felt in a long time.

Dustin nodded along. "Oh you mean the electromagnetic fields when the clouds in the atmosphere-" *What the hell was this nerd talking about?*

"No no no no." Steve held out a hand so Dustin would look at him. "Like a sexual electricity."

The kids eyes lit up in surprise and a little embarrassment. "Oh!"

Steve nodded and began to walk again, with Dustin trailing alongside him. He really hoped an adult somewhere gave this kid the talk because Steve was *not* having that conversation right now. "You feel that, then you make your move."

"And that's when you kiss her?"

Steve halted again, waving a hand in the air.

"Whoa! No slow down Romeo!" Steve began to step ahead. "Sure okay, some girls, yeah, they want you to be aggressive, you know? Strong, hot and heavy like a..."

Steve thought of long golden hair and eyes that were as equally dangerous as they were beautiful. "I don't know, like a lion."

For the past year Steve sure felt a lot like prey. Every night he'd wake up and search his family's big empty house, trying to convince himself that shadows were just shadows. When the luminescent lights at school would flicker Steve would tense up and look around, fingers itching for the bat he kept in his trunk. Every unexpected noise igniting his fight or flight instincts. And lately all Steve's been wanting to do was run.

There was something about Billy that made it different though. Steve still felt watched and hunted when Hargrove stared him down across the room. But he didn't feel like Billy wanted to destroy or hurt him. He could have done that already if that was the case.

No. There was something almost possessive about the way Billy

watched him. Like Steve was something to be claimed.

And he wasn't quite sure if that's what he wanted. "...But for others you gotta be slow. Stealthy, like a ninja."

Dustin nodded. "What type was Nancy?"

Was. Steve was still getting used to that word when it came to his and Nancy's relationship.

"Nancy's different." She was always a little too extraordinary for Hawkins. For Steve. "She's different than the other girls."

"Yeah she seems pretty special I guess." Dustin offered.

He nodded. "She is."

"Is that why you two dated even though you weren't soulmates?"

Steve stopped dead in his tracks and stared at Dustin who tripped and halted, staring at Steve trying to figure out if he crossed an invisible line.

The younger kid began to shake his head. 'Forget I said that. Sorry I was just hoping that maybe-'

"No, it's fine." Steve interrupted. "Nancy and I just never really talked about it is all."

"Oh."

Dustin and Steve began to start walking again. The older of the two cleared his throat.

"I found out Nancy had a soulmark pretty early on in our relationship."

Steve could feel Dustin's eyes on him, taking in every word. "I just figured, she chose to be with me instead of her soulmate, so maybe we were meant to be. Soulmarks aren't a hard and fast rule or anything. If you just love each other enough..."



The younger boy gave Steve's arm an awkward pat, which made him chuckle and smile in thanks. "I don't know. I figured if you loved someone as special as Nancy then maybe the universe would make some kind of exception."

Dustin's voice started to take on a more croaky, worried tone. "But... this girls special too. And there's something about her that just--"

Steve held out his hand, halting them once more. "Whoa, whoa hey hey hey. You're not falling in love with this girl are you?"

"What? No, no." Dustin looked down at his shoes. For as smart as this kid was, he was a terrible liar.

But Steve knew better than to pry or chastise. You can't just turn your heart off like a switch. Just as long as Dustin knew to be careful, maybe he'd avoid getting hurt too bad. "...Okay, good. She's only going to break your heart and you're way too young for that shit."

And maybe Steve was projecting a little at the end there, but Dustin was a good kid, and despite the fact that they'd only just met, Steve would gladly kick the ass of anyone who tried to hurt him.

He wondered if that's how Nancy felt about Mike, or Jonathan about Will. Steve never had a younger sibling to feel protective of, so he wasn't sure if this was normal or not.

Dustin was quiet after that last statement. Normally Steve would have counted as some kind of blessing, except now it just felt wrong. He looked at the younger boy next to him.

He seemed to be somewhere else now, processing everything Steve had just shared.

That point in life was always confusing. Trying to understand everything adults told you, even if none of it made sense in the first place. Steve remembered feeling like that when his parents started to tell him about soulmarks and love and everything in between.

Back then he'd wished there was someone there to offer advice or even just support. Someone to let him know things would be okay in the end.

Steve sighed. “Faberge.”

The curly-haired his looked up in confusion. “What?”

“It’s Faberge Organics.” Steve pointed to his hair, pointedly ignoring Dustin’s gaze. “Use the shampoo and the conditioner, and when your hair is damp -not wet- okay, when it’s--”

--Damp--” Dustin repeated along like he was reciting a math equation to his teacher.

--Do four puffs of the Farrah Fawcett Spray.” Steve kept his eyes to the ground. God, what was he doing with his life.

“Farrah Fawcett Spray?” Dustin giggled.

Steve stopped and rounded on Dustin, pointing a gloved hand in his face. “Yeah, Farrah Fawcett, you tell anyone I just told you that, and your ass is grass Henderson. You get that?”

Dustin looked a properly chided and redirected his gaze downwards at his feet. But Steve could still catch the slight giggle of a tremor that shook his shoulder and the smile hidden beneath that ballcap.

Steve shook his head and started walking again. “Okay.”

If anyone told Steve this morning that in just a few short hours he’d be in the middle of nowhere hunting a monster while spilling his hair care routine to a child, Steve would have laughed in their face.

Yet here he was.

Maybe all of it was yet another ridiculous attempt at Steve ignoring his real problems. But it felt nice regardless.

It was certainly better than going to school and pretending like he wasn’t a total wreck.

Besides, if Dustin’s lizard actually turned out to be a baby demogorgon, then Steve had bigger things to worry about than soulmarks.

## **Notes for the Chapter:**

Thank you to everyone who has left reviews and kudos! You are amazing!

Next chapter is most likely going to be the second-to-last of this fic. And it's going to include Billy and Steve's fight so hold on for that!

## 10. Rage

### Notes for the Chapter:

Okay I reevaluated the pacing of this fic and decided I needed at least one more chapter after this one, so you are all stuck with me for a little bit longer.

Billy dug his fingernails into the palms of his hands as he stormed, not ran, stormed out of the house to the security of his car.

His heartbeat thundered in his ears as he tried to unlock the car door. His hands were trembling and at this point Billy couldn't decide if it was in fear or anger, or which of those options was more pathetic.

He didn't stop shaking until he was sitting behind the wheel, taking in large lungfuls of air, trying to calm himself with the familiar smell of cigarettes and leather.

Billy opened his palm and looked at the broken skin from where he squeezed his hand too tight. The wounds would most likely scar and look like small crescent moons. More scars for Billy to add to his collection, more reminders of how weak and powerless he really was. His fingers curled in on themselves again, and Billy couldn't help the guttural growl that reverberated from his chest as he slammed his fist into the steering wheel.

Fuck Neil.

The man could burn in Hell for all Billy cared.

It didn't matter what, or who Billy gave up. It didn't matter what good or responsible things he'd accomplished. The man was just waiting for Billy to slip up so he could punish him again. Neil reveled in it when Billy fucked up, he could see it in his father's eyes.

Any chance he got to remind his son of what a disappointment and abomination he was, Neil took.

Billy keyed the engine and roared out of their gravel driveway, letting his car scream and rage in ways he never could. There was

always a part of him that considered just driving until Hawkins and his family were no longer looming in his rearview mirror. Until this was all a distant memory and Billy could finally be happy. It would take awhile, but he'd get there eventually.

But that would mean he'd have to leave Max behind. And as much of a pain as she tended to be, Billy's heart lurched at the thought of Neil redirecting all of his frustration onto his step-sister.

At least Billy deserved it when Neil hit him.

She still made him so angry though. He shouldn't have to be out looking for her in the middle of the night. If she wanted to disappear through her bedroom window then that was her choice. Billy shouldn't have to cancel a date to hunt Max down and bring her home.

A date that he really didn't care about, if Billy was being honest with himself. But still.

It would have been a welcome distraction to the hell he was living in now.

When Billy first found Steve he thought he finally found happiness.

He should have known better.

He should have known that Steve was too good to be true. Too beautiful and far too soft for someone as unruly and angry as Billy.

Even if he was Steve's soulmate, Billy would ruin him. Just like he ruined every other good thing in his life.

But he wasn't. And Billy had to stop thinking about the 'what-ifs'.

He gripped the steering wheel a little tighter. His anger at his father bleeding into Steve now.

Steve, who never had to worry about soulmarks. That had to be easier than knowing who your soulmate was and not being able to do anything about it. Harrington had no idea how lucky he was, and that made Billy feel sick.

The trees and suburban houses of Hawkins whipped past Billy like shadows. There was something almost ghoulish about the town at night. Like the sun and flickering electricity were the only things keeping an almost sinister darkness at bay. California was far too populated to ever feel truly haunted, and Billy missed the natural hum of the city that served as a distraction from his otherwise hellish life.

Slamming on the gas, Billy started to drive in the direction of the arcade first. With any luck he'd find Max quickly and they could both get home and out of the dark.

No way. No fucking way was Billy this unlucky.

"Am I dreaming or is that you Harrington?" He called out, staring in shrouded disbelief at the teenager standing on the Byers' porch.

Steve's hands were resting on his hips, like some exasperated mother figure. "Yeah it's me, don't cream your pants."

Billy shrugged off his jacket as he felt a heat pool in the pit of his stomach. He wasn't expecting the sarcasm.

He began walking towards the house. The place Mrs. Wheeler told him he might find Max. It was so easy charming the address from her. Billy had hoped that was some kind of sign that the rest of the night would go just as smooth. But apparently he was wrong. "What are you doing here amigo?"

"I can ask you the same thing, *amigo*." Steve crossed his arms and met Billy halfway.

The moonlight illuminated their steps like a spotlight.

Billy stared at him across the lit cigarette between his lips. Steve looked distracted, fidgety even. "Looking for my step-sister. Little birdie told me she was here."

His eye caught movement from inside the house. Someone was watching them from the window. Billy glanced over Steve's shoulder

as the other boy continued to talk. He briefly caught sight of a head of red hair peeking over the couch.

“Huh, that’s weird, I don’t know her.” Steve shrugged, unaware that Billy already found what he was looking for.

“Small, redhead, bit of a bitch?” Billy tried, watching Steve now.

“Doesn’t ring a bell. Sorry buddy.” The brunette’s soft voice didn’t waver or change at all.

Billy nodded and looked down. Out of his peripherals he could see Max and a couple other kids staring at them from the window.

At this point he was just toying with Steve. Seeing how far the other boy would go until he picked up that something was wrong.

But if past experience was any indication, Steve was pretty oblivious.

Billy had been parading around trying to get his attention, trying to give Harrington a sign that he was there, that Steve was his soulmate. But nothing worked.

So either he was a total ditz when it came to relationships, or Steve was actively ignoring him. And Billy didn’t really like either of those options.

“You know,” Billy slipped his cigarette out from between his lips. “This whole situation Harrington, it’s giving me the heebie jeebies.”

“Yeah? Why’s that?” Steve was looking at him now, really looking at him, searching Billy’s eyes for a sign that something was wrong.

He took another pull from the cigarette, taking his time, making Steve wait like Billy had to wait all those years. “My thirteen year-old sister goes missing all day. And then I find her with you, at a stranger’s house, and then you lie to me about it.”

Steve had the nerve to laugh in his face. “Man were you dropped to much as a child or what?”

Billy smiled, smoke billowing from his mouth and surrounding them

both. But Harrington didn't react. He just continued to stare Billy down, silently daring him to make a move.

Billy was starting to get a glimpse of the old king of Hawkins. There was something incredibly bold and tenacious about this Steve. Billy had a good amount of muscle on the taller boy, but it seemed as if Harrington didn't even give that a thought. It was the same kind of brazen confidence you'd expect a child to have facing the ocean for the first time.

"I don't know what you don't understand about what I just said," Steve continued. "She's not here."

Billy stepped closer, staring into Steve's dark eyes. "Then who the hell is that?" Billy gestured over Steve's shoulder with his cigarette.

He didn't watch Steve turn around and realize that the kids were completely visible the entire time. Or see how Max and her friends disappeared from view, as if that would change anything now. No, Billy kept his eyes on Steve.

He counted every freckle and mole that decorated Steve's perfect face, and marveled at the way the moonlight cast an ethereal glow on his skin. Billy reveled in the dawning realization and fear that filled Steve's eyes.

All of this should have been his. Billy didn't know if it was his fault for carving out his soulmark all those years ago, or if it was Steve's fault for not having a mark to begin with, but at this point he didn't care. He just felt cheated and so very angry.

"Oh shit..." Steve muttered under his breath.

The brunette turned back, mouth already moving to come up with some kind of excuse or explanation. But Billy was done listening.

All it took was a little shove and Steve was on the ground.

"I told you to plant your feet." Billy muttered as he towered over him. He looked at Steve and all he saw was a scared boy, curled up on his bathroom floor who'd rather cut out his own soulmark than face his father's fury again. Anger churned within Billy's lungs as he



kicked Steve in the stomach before marching inside the house.

Moments began to blur together for Billy. All that pent up rage and frustration was vibrating under his skin, burning through him.

He could barely hear himself as he grabbed Lucas and smashed him into a bookshelf, threatening him, like his own father had done earlier that evening.

He was just so angry. The edges of his vision started to turn red as Lucas kicked him.

“You are so dead Sinclair!” Billy growled out, completely unfazed by the utter terror in the eyes of the kids in front of him. They should be scared. It was about time someone besides Billy felt terrified.

Things were pulled back into focus when a strong arm gripped Billy’s shoulder and spun him around. Steve’s hair was tousled and hanging in his face. “No, you are.”

Billy anticipated the hit, but the sheer power of it surprised him, sending him reeling back into the kitchen. It felt like electricity, like when Billy gripped Steve’s hand at basketball practice.

Billy couldn’t help the cackle that escaped his throat. Even as the blood dripped from his nose and the pain began to bloom across his face, Billy felt so alive. He turned back to Steve, watching at the taller boy pushed the hair out of his eyes and planted his feet firmly on the scuffed wooden floor. There was a spark of fear in his eyes, the same fear Billy saw on the court.

“Looks like you got some fire in you after all!” Billy could feel how hoarse his voice sounded. It matched the way he felt. Angry. Unhinged. Desperate.

“I’ve been waiting to meet this King Steve everyone’s been telling me so much about!”

But that was only a half-truth. Deep down, Billy just wanted to meet Steve. His Steve. The soulmate he was promised when his soulmark first appeared.

Billy felt his chest rise and fall in unsteady breaths as Steve stepped closer. Part of him was expecting Steve to hit him. A more wretched, pathetic part of Billy wanted Steve to kiss him. Give him any kind of attention to let him know that Steve saw him. Acknowledged him. Wanted him.

What Billy didn't expect was for Steve to reach out and gently touch his exposed skin. Warmth spread from Steve's fingertips and enveloped Billy's entire chest, pooling above his heart, a breath away from the scar where his soulmark used to be. Billy's breath caught for a moment as Steve stared into his eyes.

"Get out." The brunette pushed Billy away with the same hand that brought so much warmth and peace only a second ago.

He teetering back from Harrington's touch. The lingering heat festered into a fiery rage, burning into Billy's skin. It felt like the night he carved Steve's name out of his ribs. The same burning shame and betrayal. Only this time it wasn't Billy rejecting his soulmate. Steve was rejecting him.

His arm was swinging before Billy could process it himself. The fire and rage was taking over, lashing out.

Steve dodged and managed to land another hit to Billy's jaw. The same electrical pulse shot through his body, only this time it made him feel sick with anger. A nauseating reminder of what he's been denied.

Billy fell back into a table. Maniacal laughter filled his ears and it took Billy a second to realize it was coming from him.

Steve hit again, sending Billy careening further into the room. Part of him thought about fighting back. But it almost felt good to have Harrington hit him. At least he was paying attention to him, touching him. Not in the ways Billy had dreamt about but if life had taught him anything it was to take what you can get.

Another hit came. The children were rooting Steve on as Billy fell into the kitchen counter. The taste of blood filled his mouth, coating his throat and teeth.

It felt like his whole body was on fire, bursting at the seams just waiting to erupt. He was still laughing. His lungs and throat ached from it, but deep down Billy knew it was the only thing keeping him from crying out in anguish.

But boys don't cry, especially when they fight. At least, that's what Neil had beaten into him all these years. The Hargroves are never weak, never irresponsible, and they never, never lose a fight.

Billy's fingers gripped a kitchen plate. The children's cheers died away as the glass shattered against Steve's head as the brunette staggered back. The rage surged beneath Billy's skin again as he stormed over to Harrington's hunched over frame.

Steve just barely dodged Billy's fist as it grazed over his head and knocked some books off of a shelf. The pain didn't even faze Billy anymore as he gripped Steve and forced him to look into his eyes. He blinks blearily, trying to focus on Billy.

"No one tells me what to do." He growls before headbutting the brunette.

Steve fell back, sliding across the floor as the children begin to shout again, this time begging for Billy to stop.

He drowned out their voices, only focusing on the crumpled teen in front of him. Harrington was curling in on himself, all the fight leaving his body like water down a drain.

He marched forward, reveling in the sight of Steve being so weak and vulnerable.

Billy imagined carving his name into Steve's ribs.

If you could cut out a soulmark maybe you could cut one in. You just had to be deliberate. Mean it. Want it with all your being. Billy was sure of it.

And god did he want this more than anything.

Billy knelt down and straddled Steve's smaller frame, enjoying the feeling of the other boy beneath him.

Steve weakly reached out and gripped Billy's arms, a last ditch effort at fighting back. But it only enraged Billy more as he easily pulled free and swung his arm back, getting ready to strike.

There was a brief moment where Steve made eye contact. There wasn't any anger or hatred there. Just fear and confusion. As if he was wondering why Billy would hurt him.

The first hit struck Steve just above the eye, knocking his face to the side, only to be pummeled by Billy's other fist.

He could vaguely hear the kids screaming behind him, pleading and crying out on Steve's behalf. But Billy didn't listen. He just kept hitting and hitting until Steve looked as bloody and broken as Billy felt.

But it wasn't enough. It would never be enough. Even as Steve stopped moving beneath him, even as his soulmark scar burned into his skin like it never had before, Billy kept hitting.

With each strike he saw some new way the universe had cheated him. Billy saw his mother dying. His father beating him. Cutting out his soulmark. Losing Hal. Moving to Hawkins. Finding Steve only to be denied happiness yet again.

None of it was fair. And Billy was tired of just taking it, keeping all that anger buried deep until it festered into something ugly.

He looked at Steve and all he saw was everything he'd been denied. And he hated him for it. He hated himself for not being able to fight back against any of it. So he ruined Steve. Just like Billy knew he would.

A sudden stabbing sensation in his neck jolted Billy back to reality. He turned to see what had happened, but everything started to fade and spin.

Billy stood and turned around. It was Max.

His step-sister was staring at him like he was a monster. "What did you do?"

The sharp prickling sensation wasn't going away. Billy reached and was surprised to find a syringe sticking out of his neck. It stung as he pulled it out, which only seemed to make the world spin and blur more.

"The hell is this?" Billy slurred out as he stumbled back, falling on the ground next to Steve's prone body.

Everything was fading away. Even the pain from his soulmark scar was gone and Billy couldn't help but gasp and laugh in relief. He hadn't felt this good in years.

As his vision began to fade he was barely able to make out the image of Max standing over him with a bat. She was threatening him, telling him to stay away from her and her friends.

"Screw you." Billy mumbled out.

That must not have been the answer she was looking for because the next thing Billy knew, she slammed the bat between his legs, dangerously close to his balls. It wasn't until she was prying it from the wooden floor that Billy even realized the bat had a bunch of nails hammered into it. *Christ where'd she get that?*

Max was screaming again. Ordering him to tell her he understood.

Everything was fading to black.

"I understand." Billy slurred.

"What?" Max demanded, in a tone so similar to Neil it made Billy's pulse quicken.

"I understand." He repeated again before falling into blissful oblivion.

Billy woke up hours later, alone, with a killer headache, and without a car.

It was only as he stumbled around looking for a bathroom that Billy noticed the state of the house. There were papers everywhere, taped

onto every surface creating some kind of veiny image. Were they supposed to be tunnels? What exactly was Steve and everyone doing in this house?

*Steve.*

Billy made it to the toilet just in time to throw up as the memories of the night came flooding back. He'd hit Steve. He'd hit him a lot.

Billy leant against the toilet bowl for what felt like hours waiting for the shaking to stop. All the rage had melted away, leaving only guilt and exhaustion in its place.

Was Steve alright?

Billy staggered towards the sink, running the water and washing the taste of blood and bile from his mouth.

What a fucking dumb question. Of course Steve wasn't okay, if the blurred memories of Billy repeatedly smashing in his face were anything to go by.

His own reflection didn't look too great either. Billy's heart twisted at the memory of a different time he stared at himself in the bathroom mirror, and unconsciously reached to brush his hands against the scar that had formed years ago.

Except Billy couldn't find it.

He patted his hand around his chest briefly before the realization that he *couldn't feel his scar* truly set in.

Billy tore his shirt open and turned to search for it in the mirror. But what he found sucked all the air from his lungs.

It was a name. And not just any name. It was Steve's. The letter weren't as swooping or carefree as he remembered, but it was definitely still Steve's name printed next to Billy's heart.

He gently traced the letters in disbelief, afraid that if he was too rough the name would disappear again. But they didn't fade or vanish. It was there. His soulmark was there.

Billy felt a tear tumble down the side of his face but he couldn't bring himself to care.

How? How had it come back? What happened?

Billy staggered out of the bathroom, looking around the house for some kind of answer but found none. He remembered his scar burning as he and Steve fought, but they'd tussled before at basketball practice and nothing like this had happened.

Then Billy remembered when Steve touched him, right before they fought, before everything felt like it was on fire.

There was so much warmth and comfort it was intoxicating. Billy was just too blind and angry to feel it at the time.

Was that it? Had it just taken that gentle touch this entire time?

Billy felt dizzy from all the unanswered questions. His mind was struggling to process everything he was thinking and feeling as Billy stumbled outside. Even the cold November air didn't faze him as he walked into the dark.

The only thing that mattered was finding Steve.

*Steve.*

Billy stopped in his tracks. The guilt came back in waves. Billy could have killed him if Max hadn't stepped in. How could Steve forgive him after what he'd done?

Billy began walking again, slower this time.

What was he going to say? How could he make this right?

He couldn't. Plain and simple.

He had become a monster, and almost destroyed Steve in the process. His own bloody knuckles were a grim reminder of that.

Billy's hand absently reached for his soulmark, yearning for some kind of comfort he knew he didn't deserve.

Could he even tell Steve the truth? That he was Billy's soulmate?

And even then, his soulmark returning didn't change the fact that Steve didn't have a mark of his own.

*But it did, didn't it?* It had to mean something.

There was always a risk in believing that some things were meant to be. Which is why Billy didn't put a lot of faith in that kind of stuff. He'd been burned too many times to let himself get his hopes up.

But a soulmark coming back after all these years? There was really no explanation beyond some kind of cosmic intervention.

Billy's steps took a steadier, more determined pace. He'd lived in fear and denial for far too long to just fall back into those habits again.

It took hours for Billy to find his way home. But it gave him much needed time to think.

He wasn't going to approach Steve, at least for the time being. Billy was going to respect Max's demands and put some distance between him and her friends. To give them all a chance to heal, at least till the end of the school year. Then Billy would try and reach out.

And even then, there was a good chance Steve wouldn't want to talk to him. Period. And Billy had to prepare for that possibility.

But he had to try.

He was tired of denying himself a chance at happiness.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

I'm really curious as to what lines or phrases have stuck out for you throughout this fic (if any) so far. I'm amping up to start on another fic series and want to know what's working/not working for you guys. If you want to (or have the time) I'd love to hear your thoughts or if you just want to copy/paste parts you liked in the comments that would be amazing.



I'm really working on trying to strengthen my writing skills here.

And as always thank you so much for reading this far! Love you all!

**Author's Note:**

Thank you so much for checking this fic out!

Please leave a comment and let me know what you think!

you can find me at [harringrovecryptid](#) on tumblr.